

# Holly (Stephen King)

Holly by Stephen King follows private investigator Holly Gibney as she unravels a dark mystery involving a missing woman and a series of murders.

## 1. October 17, 2012

On October 17, 2012, in a declining old city by a lake, Sugar Heights emerges as a notably pleasant suburb, especially Ridge Road that stretches from Bell College of Arts and Sciences to the expansive Deerfield Park. Despite the unkempt Thickets on the west, the park is meticulously maintained, offering a picturesque setting complete with ponds, playgrounds, and a vibrant community life, though lacking a public pool due to budget constraints.

Jorge Castro, a forty-year-old creative writing teacher at the college, maintains a healthy lifestyle to avoid becoming an "American manslob" as he ages. One drizzly night, he jogs towards Deerfield Park, encountering only the old poet observing the mist along his route.

Upon reaching the park, Jorge assists Emily Harris, a colleague, and her husband, mistakenly thinking their van's battery died. Instead, Jorge is incapacitated by a sting-like injection and kidnapped by the elderly couple.

Waking in a cage within a well-equipped basement, Jorge realizes he's been kidnapped by the Harrises. Distraught, he navigates through the initial shock, dehydration, and hunger, all while attempting to communicate or understand the motives behind his capture. His attempts are met with silence or cryptic interactions, escalating his desperation.

Emily Harris, now displaying control, forces Jorge into a cruel form of compliance, having him consume raw liver and its juice before finally granting him water—a disturbing interaction hinting at a complex, yet undisclosed, rationale for his imprisonment. Throughout, Jorge's pleas for communication or release are ignored, emphasizing the despair and helplessness of his situation, while the narrative carefully balances elements of suspense and psychological horror amid the otherwise normal backdrop of the academic and natural setting.

## 2. July 22, 2021

Zoom has fundamentally transformed since the start of Covid-19, evolving from a glitchy communication tool into an essential app with sophisticated technology and production quality. Holly Gibney reflects on this progress while attending a Zoom funeral for a loved one, where she chooses to keep her camera off due to her deeply private nature. After the service, she declines a call from Barbara Robinson but eventually answers, revealing her struggle to cope with the current state of the world and her personal grief.

Holly is deeply affected by the pandemic and the loss of her Uncle Henry, who surprisingly survives a Covid outbreak in his nursing home thanks to being vaccinated, unlike Holly's mother, Charlotte, who dies after refusing vaccination and attending an anti-mask rally. This loss plunges Holly into a deep mourning period, compounded by her difficult relationship with her mother. Despite the emotional turmoil, Holly cannot detach from her investigative work, as evident when she responds to a plea for help regarding a missing person, Bonnie Dahl, further illustrating Holly's commitment even in the face of personal despair.

Holly's conversation with Pete Huntley, her business partner who is also suffering from a mild case of Covid, demonstrates their dedication to their work as detectives. Despite Pete's advice to postpone taking on any new cases, Holly finds herself compelled to delve into Bonnie Dahl's disappearance after hearing the distress in her mother's messages, driven by a professional obligation and a personal resonance with the plea for help.

The chapter portrays Holly's internal conflict, caught between her grief and her instinct to help others, even as she deals with the complexities of loss and the ever-present shadow of the pandemic. Holly's decision to meet with Bonnie's mother, despite her own vulnerabilities, underscores her profound sense of duty and compassion. The narrative also touches on themes of technological dependence, the impact of the pandemic on personal and professional lives, and the human ability to persist in the face of adversity.

## **12. July 23, 2021**

On a sultry afternoon in a neighborhood marked by treeless streets named after trees, Jerome meets Vera Steinman on Sycamore Street, where trees are notably absent. Vera lives in a humble home, struggling with the heat as her air conditioning fights its last battle. Jerome, investigating a missing woman named Bonnie Dahl, hopes to shed light on an overlapping mystery involving Vera's son, Peter, who disappeared before the pandemic began, under the shadow of the city's policing turmoil.

Peter Steinman's disappearance had been thoroughly investigated, with suspicion circling around the idea of him running away due to distress at home—his mother's drinking and the fallout from his parents' divorce. This theory was partly spurred by conversations with Katya Graves, a school counselor who revealed Peter's troubles at school and his fantasy of fleeing to Florida to live with his uncle near Disney World. Despite Vera's transformation in the year leading to Peter's disappearance, improving her life and mending her relationship with her son, the boy vanished, leaving behind a mystery and a mother clinging to fading hope.

Vera firmly believes her son is dead, haunted by the absence of closure and the perpetual possibility that hope offers. She describes her descent back into alcoholism, a coping mechanism for the unbearable reality of Peter's unresolved case. Throughout their conversation, it's evident that Vera oscillates between maintaining a composed exterior and succumbing to the despair and guilt that torment her, evident in her meticulous appearance contrasted with the reality of her suffering. Jerome learns not only about Peter's disappearance but also witnesses the profound impact it has had on Vera—transforming her into someone caught between the roles of a grieving mother and a woman deeply ensnared by her vices.

The situation brings Jerome face to face with the stark and painful reality of missing children cases—the endless waiting, the clinging to fragments of hope, and the devastating toll it takes on those left behind. Peter's skateboard, found in a park but not accompanied by any sign of him, stands as a silent testament to his abrupt departure from his life and the lives of those who cared for him. The absence of conclusive evidence leaves Vera and Jerome in a limbo, one filled with unanswered questions and the heavy burden of what-ifs, underscoring the profound and lingering tragedy of Peter Steinman's disappearance.

## **17. February 8, 2021**

Emily warmly invites Barbara into her home after Barbara, adorned in red attire, seeks a favor related to the writing program. Attracted by Emily's well-appointed kitchen and the offer of a special tea blend, Barbara, a coffee aficionado, accepts the tea to maintain goodwill. They discuss Barbara's admiration for the poet Olivia Kingsbury and her wish for Kingsbury to mentor her. Emily, though outwardly supportive, internally expresses reservations about Kingsbury's condition and her own feelings towards Barbara's request.

Emily challenges Barbara to share one of her poems for critique. Barbara selects "Faces Change," a poem reflecting a harrowing experience. Emily critiques the poem in a private analysis, suggesting minor adjustments, and offers to connect Barbara with Kingsbury, implying Barbara's talent. The interaction reveals Emily's complex nature; she toggles between encouragement and internal skepticism, reflecting on generational and racial biases that she acknowledges but does not voice out loud.

The chapter concludes with Emily showing her husband, Roddy, a video capturing Barbara discreetly discarding the tea and taking a cookie, a moment which they find amusing. Emily explains her motive for giving Barbara the stale tea was out of curiosity, showcasing a playful yet somewhat manipulative aspect of her personality. This interaction underscores themes of mentorship, artistic aspiration, and the underlying complexities within human relationships, hinting at Emily's multifaceted character that blends warmth with an analytical and calculating mind.

## **38. July 28, 2021**

She waits until ten-fifteen, then tries again. Voicemail. She leaves another message, this one colder: "It's Penny Dahl again. Where are you? Call me as soon as you get this. It's important."

The fireflies are fewer, the night fully settled in. Penny's irritation has turned to worry. It's unlike Holly Gibney to miss an appointment or to be inaccessible, especially on a night when she promised to deliver potentially vital information. The lateness of the hour, the unanswered calls—Penny feels a creeping unease. It's compounded by her growing fear for her daughter, now missing without a trace for weeks.

By eleven, sitting alone on the porch in the dark save for the dwindling glow of her smartphone screen, Penny decides to act. She dials the number of Izzy Jaynes, the city police detective Holly mentioned in one of their initial meetings. After a brief explanation, her voice tight with a mixture of fear and anger, she says, "I'm worried something's happened to her. She was supposed to call me hours ago with information about my daughter's disappearance. This isn't like her. Can you check on her? Please?"

From her porch, with the night deepening around her and her daughter still lost in the world somewhere, Penny Dahl waits, hoping for the best but fearing the worst.

## **40. July 30, 2021**

On July 30, 2021, Holly Gibney is brought into Kiner Memorial's conference room, where FBI agent Herbert Beale and others, including District Attorney Albert Tantle, are present for a briefing related to a gruesome case involving cannibalism. Holly, involved in the investigation due to being kidnapped and defending herself by killing her kidnappers, participates in the meeting via wheelchair as per hospital protocol. Despite the lack of an interstate angle, the FBI's involvement is attributed to the case's high-profile nature.

During the meeting, Holly is shown evidence and confirms her actions in self-defense. The meeting reveals disturbing findings, including human remains processed as food and unconventional uses of human remains, shocking everyone involved. Holly recounts her harrowing experience, detailing how she managed to survive and turn the tables on her captors, leading to their deaths and her escape.

In addition to the criminal aspects, the meeting touches on the emotional toll on the victims' families, highlighting Holly's resolve to ensure they are informed properly. The district attorney expresses frustration over the lack of prosecutable suspects due to Holly's self-defense actions leading to the deaths of the perpetrators.

Later, Holly is requested to meet Detective Izzy Jaynes in the hospital chapel, where they discuss the challenging task of informing the next of kin, revealing the devastating impact on Penny Dahl, a victim's relative. Holly's earlier confrontation with her captors is juxtaposed with the current emotional confrontations, illustrating the wide-reaching consequences of the case.

Meanwhile, Jerome deals with the emotional labor of informing Vera Steinman about her son's fate, navigating the complexities of delivering tragic news with empathy and care. The narrative converges on themes of justice, the psychological impact of violence, and the human capacity for both cruelty and resilience. The chapter concludes with Jerome comforting Vera, lying to ease her pain by assuring her son did not suffer, despite the uncertainty surrounding the events.

## **27. May 19, 2021**

On May 19, 2021, Marie and Barbara have coffee, while Olivia, experiencing heartbeat arrhythmia, opts for caffeine-free Red Zinger iced tea. Gathered in the living room, Olivia reveals the gradual process of the Penley Prize announcement, comparing its drawn-out nature to a TV competition, much to Barbara's dismay who learns that no further submissions of her poetry are required. Olivia hints at Barbara's dwindling reserve of high-quality poetry, advising against sending more, and emphasizes the need for a statement of poetic purpose if Barbara advances to the final five. Marie urges Olivia to rest, noticing her fatigue, a suggestion Olivia momentarily resists.

Olivia, battling illness and embodying a mentor's wisdom, guides Barbara on the nuances of poetry and the impending requirements, leading to discussions about Barbara's literary engagements and former teachers. Olivia's narrative swiftly intertwines fond memories of Jorge, a cherished but marginalized teacher, with critiques of Emily Harris's exclusive attitudes, revealing the complex social undercurrents within their academic circle. As Olivia reminisces, she navigates between past and present, enriching the conversation with anecdotes and revealing the intertwined dynamics of personal relationships, societal biases, and the relentless pursuit of literary expression within their community.

Barbara considers Olivia's advice on crafting a meaningful statement of poetic purpose, reflecting on the essential elements that encapsulate the essence of her poetic journey. The dialogue transitions to a lighter note with Olivia joking about her age and physical frailties, yet it underscores her indomitable spirit and the deep camaraderie shared amongst the group. The chapter closes with Olivia recalling a vivid memory of a department meeting and a story about Emily Harris's determination to maintain a traditional Christmas party amidst the pandemic, showcasing her narrative prowess and the impact of her experiences on Barbara's understanding of poetry and life.

## **14. July 23, 2021**

Jerome relays to Holly about his ordeal with Vera, who had to be rushed to the hospital amidst a full-blown medical emergency, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic overwhelming local medical services. Jerome's frantic efforts to save Vera highlight his concern and the grim realities of navigating health crises during the pandemic, especially when Vera's condition led to no available hospital beds and a quick discharge post-treatment.

Jerome's recount of the incident is filled with worry and dark humor, reflecting on the bizarre and harrowing experience of saving someone's life under less than ideal circumstances. He reveals Vera's struggle with alcohol and potential substance misuse, worrying about her future wellbeing. Holly and Jerome discuss the possible implications for Vera's son, Peter, alluding to broader concerns about his whereabouts and safety, amid hints of a deeper mystery involving missing persons in their community.

Holly's routine evening and her interaction with Pete reveal a tenacious but cautious approach to investigation, combined with personal reflections on life's fragility, informed by past experiences and current worries over the missing individuals. Pete's health struggles with COVID-19 underscore the pervasive impact of the pandemic on their lives and work.

The narrative intertwines personal dilemmas, societal challenges, and the pursuit of resolving distressing mysteries. Holly's contemplations and her interactions with Lakeisha introduce a somber tone, touching on fears and the harsh realities of dealing with possible tragedies. The conversation with Lakeisha starkly presents the emotional toll of Bonnie Rae Dahl's disappearance on those around her, hinting at the grave concerns overshadowing their community.

This chapter paints a vivid picture of individuals grappling with their personal demons, societal breakdowns, and the quest for understanding amidst chaos. The narrative skillfully balances elements of suspense, human emotion, and the stark realities of confronting crises, both personal and societal, fostering a compelling buildup to the unraveling mystery.

## **4. July 23, 2021**

Holly Gibney meets early with Penny Dahl, a distressed mother seeking her missing daughter, Bonnie Rae Dahl, at the Fourth Street municipal parking lot. Before their meeting, Holly observes a Volvo plastered with images of Bonnie and missing person notices. Holly, drawing parallels between Penny's voice and her late mother's, expected Bonnie to be younger but finds the actual photos show a woman in her mid-twenties with a vibrant and carefree appearance.

Inside the Frederick Building, Penny, appearing unkempt and focused solely on finding her daughter, discusses Bonnie's disappearance with Holly. She provides photos and mentions a security video from a Jet Mart, which Detective Jaynes shared with her, showing Bonnie's last known location. They watch the video, capturing Bonnie's mundane final moments before vanishing. Penny shares her frustration with the police's lack of progress in finding Bonnie, emphasizing a mysterious note found with Bonnie's abandoned bike that suggests she had "had enough," though Penny vehemently denies her daughter would harm herself.

The chapter dives deep into Holly's investigation as she begins to unravel the context of Bonnie's life: her job at Reynolds Library, her relationships, and her last interactions. Insights into Holly's methodical approach to the case are provided, revealing her dedication to uncovering the truth amid her complex feelings of grief and responsibility. The chapter ends with Penny reluctantly discussing a heated argument she had with Bonnie over her former boyfriend, Tom Higgins, hinting at deeper issues beneath the surface.

This encounter sets the stage for a layered investigation, introducing various characters and potential leads while showcasing Holly's empathy and determination. It underlines the emotional toll of a missing loved one and the desperate search for answers against a backdrop of personal and societal challenges.

## **7. November 27, 2018**

On an unusually warm November evening in a city by the lake, Peter "Stinky" Steinman is skateboarding towards the Dairy Whip, dreaming of burgers. The street, shrouded in mist, is deserted except for a suspicious van parked at an old gas station which Stinky fails to notice. Recounted is the event three years prior that earned him the nickname "Stinky" after accidentally stepping in dog feces on his way to school. Despite his efforts to clean up, the name sticks.

At the Dairy Whip, Stinky finds his friends, Richie and Tommy, who are preparing to leave for prior commitments. After they leave, Stinky attempts some skateboarding tricks but decides to head home when he fails, hoping to catch WWE Smackdown without disturbing his mother, who is busy with work after overcoming past troubles.

With only fifty cents to his name and unwilling to face the rejection of asking for credit from "Wicked Wanda" at the Whip, Stinky retreats. While pretending to be a hero like John Wick, he's interrupted by an elderly man seeking help for his wife, who's supposedly stuck in a wheelchair with a dead battery by their van. Stinky, in a burst of chivalry, agrees to help without accepting the man's offer of ten dollars, envisioning himself as Jackie Chan who wouldn't take money for a good deed. However, as they approach the van and the task at hand becomes clear, Stinky negotiates for three dollars to satisfy his hunger with a burger from the Whip, showcasing his blend of naivety and developing street smarts.

## **36. July 27, 2021**

In this chapter, Holly Gibney is deep into her investigation, her keen sense continuously pulling at threads that might seem irrelevant to many. She begins by receiving an unexpected call from Randy Holsten, who brings up a seemingly trivial detail about Bonnie, a girl Holly is investigating, claiming she was a Christmas elf during a party. This minor piece of information leads Holly down a path of connecting dots that appear unrelated at first glance.

Her investigation leads her to reach out to Lakeisha Stone, who confirms Bonnie's role as one of Santa's elves during a COVID-era Zoom Christmas party hosted by two retired professors, the Harrises. This connection sparks an intuition in Holly, driving her to pursue the lead further. Despite trying to remain grounded in facts rather than suppositions, Holly can't help but follow her gut feeling that there's more to Bonnie's disappearance and her connection to the Harrises.

Attempting to trace Bonnie's steps, Holly learns that Bonnie had worked for Mrs. Harris after the Christmas party, aiding in administrative and computer-related tasks. This piece of information adds another layer to Holly's investigation, hinting at possible personal connections between Bonnie and the people she worked for. As Holly delves deeper, she becomes increasingly involved in her work, her thoughts consumed by the case.

Amidst her investigative work, Holly receives a call from Tanya Robinson, updating her on Barbara, a mutual acquaintance, and her recent accomplishments and challenges, including Barbara's close relationship with her mentor, Olivia Kingsbury, who is nearing the end of her life. This conversation, while seemingly detached from Holly's investigation, underlines the personal connections and emotional depth involved in Holly's life beyond her work.

The chapter closes with Holly trying to unwind, only to be drawn back into her investigative mindset by a text from Barbara, responding to an inquiry about Cary Dressler, a figure potentially related to her case. Holly's relentless pursuit of truth, her methodical approach to the investigation, and the personal interactions that intersect her professional life paint a picture of a deeply involved and complex character who is as driven by her intuitions as she is by the facts of the case.

### **33. July 3, 2021**

Caught in a harrowing situation, Bonnie finds herself trapped in a cell, struggling with extreme hunger and thirst. Her captors, the Harrises, have left her with nothing but two bottles of water, a cup of Ka'Chava, and a raw piece of liver she cannot bring herself to eat. The discomfort of her situation is palpable, fed by her vivid memories of the last meal she had—a tuna-and-egg sandwich—contrasting sharply with her current dire circumstances.

Rodney Harris, one of her captors, later returns, embodying a casual, unsettling presence in his firetruck pajamas. He insists she eat the liver for water, revealing a twisted sense of concern for her nutritional balance that borders on the obsessive. Despite the danger she's in, Bonnie's resolve to escape strengthens. She negotiates for a fresh piece of liver with a clear strategy: compliance for survival, yet Rodney remains unyielding.

Meanwhile, upstairs, Emily Harris grapples with her own torment. The special diet she and Rodney adhere to, aimed at extending their lives through the consumption of specific organs, is failing. Their desperation is evident as they discuss their declining health and the accelerated timetable for their next victim, Bonnie. The narrative reveals a cycle of predation driven by a grotesque attempt to stave off aging, suggesting that Bonnie was not the first and likely won't be the last victim of their dietary experiments.

Rodney's late-night return to the basement with a fresh piece of liver highlights the sinister lengths the couple will go to maintain their health. Their rationale, cloaked in pseudo-scientific jargon and rituals, barely conceals the underlying horror of their actions. Bonnie's compliance becomes a dance of strategic survival, as she consumes the water offered yet remains wary of Rodney's intentions.

This chapter starkly contrasts the mundane with the macabre, illustrating the desperation of its characters through the lens of captivity and the unnatural pursuit of longevity. It sets a chilling tone for the story, where human life is commodified in the quest for an impossible ideal, showcasing the extreme measures some will take to fight the inevitable decline that comes with age.

### **20. July 25, 2021**

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### **11. December 4–19, 2020**

In December 2020, amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, Bell College President Hubert Crumley announces a shift to remote learning, canceling all in-person activities, including the vital lab sessions and the annual Christmas party tradition held since 1992. Roddy Harris expresses his frustration, emphasizing the importance of labs for science courses, while Emily contemplates the loss of their traditional social gathering. Despite their disappointment, they adapt, focusing on their roles and responsibilities within their respective departments. Emily, in particular, finds solace in her work for the Writer's Workshop.

Embracing the imposed limitations, Emily proposes a unique idea to transition their Christmas party to a virtual format, adding a creative twist to address the challenge of celebrating amidst pandemic restrictions. They decide to host a Zoom party and employ staff anonymously as "Santa's elves" to deliver food and drinks to local attendees. This plan not only ensures the party's continuity but also adheres to safety protocols, making it a significant success and highlighting the power of innovation and community in times of hardship.

During the party, a special delivery by a young woman named Bonnie Dahl, who had previously taken Emily's Early American Writers class, underscores the personal connections and impacts beyond academic settings. Bonnie's enthusiasm and aspirations as a writer, along with her mention of the Writer's Workshop application, showcase the intertwining personal and professional lives within the academic community. The encounter with Bonnie hints at potential future collaborations or support, emphasizing the importance of nurturing talent and providing opportunities within educational environments.

This chapter highlights the resilience and adaptability of individuals in navigating challenges presented by the pandemic, while also showcasing the importance of maintaining tradition and community spirit through innovative solutions. The personal interactions and the successful virtual Christmas party serve as a testament to the enduring human spirit and the ability to find joy and connection despite adversity.

### **3. September 10, 2015**

On September 10, 2015, Cary Dressler finds solace and a moment of relaxation on Drive-In Rock, a secluded rocky outcrop in Deerfield Park. Drawing comfort from his routine of inhaling good-quality marijuana, Cary spends his evening post-work unwinding as he indulges in watching "Raiders of the Lost Ark" from the Magic City Drive-In, albeit without sound, a minor inconvenience bypassed by his familiarity with the film. This spot offers an escape not just from the confines of his job at Strike Em Out Lanes, but from the conventional cinema experience, trading Dolby sounds for the freedom to smoke and the ambience of the outdoor setting.

As Cary settles into his routine, choosing between joints and planning the small pleasures of his evening, the calmness of his isolation is pierced by an unexpected voice. The momentary paranoia gives way to curiosity, revealing a scene unfolding on Red Bank Avenue, a part of the city marked by its dilapidation and the encroaching wilderness of the Thickets. Cary witnesses an elderly woman in a wheelchair and a man, presumably accompanying her, stranded by a van with a dead battery, their conversation floating up to his vantage point. While the man's dead phone halts their chance of immediate rescue, Cary's distraction with their predicament doesn't prompt him into action.

This chapter encapsulates a moment in Cary Dressler's life, painting a vivid picture of his youthful carelessness, tinged with a hint of solitude he seems to both cherish and, momentarily, question. The juxtaposition of Cary's laid-back, recreational pursuit with the sudden intrusion of the reality faced by the stranded pair opens a narrative of contrasts - between youth and age, carefreeness and responsibility, isolation and the unseen connections between strangers in the city. Cary's decision to remain a distant observer, rather than an intervener, sets a tone of introspection and missed opportunities that may echo throughout the unfolding story.

### **41. August 4, 2021**

On August 4, 2021, Holly is interrupted from a distracting evening by the arrival of Isabelle Jaynes, alongside Herbert Beale and Curtis Rogan from the FBI. Their visit concerns a shocking case making headlines, propelled into the spotlight by diaries discovered in Emily Harris's closet, starting in October 2012, before Jorge Luis Castro's murder. Curtis Rogan, an FBI profiler, highlights the extensive and horrifying content of these diaries, spanning over a thousand pages, revealing Emily's deep-seated hatred and psychosis far exceeding her partner Rodney's inclination towards violence. These diaries detail Emily's detestation for Castro, filled with appalling racial slurs and a broader, venomous view of others, suggesting a level of hatred that was kept hidden even from her husband.



The discussions reveal Emily as the instigator in the murder and cannibalism of Castro, a deed she persuaded her husband to partake in under deluded beliefs of it having miracle cures for their physical ailments, alongside other baseless benefits. Despite Rodney Harris's potential hesitancy, highlighted by his inability to move beyond mere frustration at societal norms and taboos, it was Emily's persuasive and deeply disturbed mindset that initiated their descent into repeated acts of cannibalism. These disturbing revelations provide a penetrating look into the psyche of Emily Harris, illustrating a blend of psychological manipulation and psychotic belief systems leading to their heinous acts, as uncovered through these diaries which are dubbed by Rogan as invaluable from a psychological perspective, despite their grotesque and chilling contents.

## **32. July 27, 2021**

On July 27, 2021, Holly Gibney drives down Ridge Road, stopping in a two-hour parking zone to make a call to the Harris household, aiming to inquire about Cary Dressler in connection with a series of auto thefts she is investigating. Speaking with Professor Harris, Holly explains her interest in Dressler, mentioning her visit to Strike Em Out Lanes, where she saw a team photo including Dressler. Although initially disinterested, Harris agrees to let Holly come by for a brief conversation.

Meanwhile, Harris discusses the incoming visit with his wife, Emily, who struggles with sciatica. They speculate on the coincidence of Holly investigating two individuals they are connected with, pondering the implications. Harris, facing the early signs of cognitive decline, reassures Emily of his capability to manage the conversation, despite her concerns.

Upon her arrival, Holly meets Harris, who is dressed casually. He dismisses concerns about COVID-19 skeptically and insists on continuing his work while they talk, citing his wife's migraine. The conversation is observed by Emily via a hidden camera, worried that Harris might inadvertently reveal too much due to his declining cognitive abilities.

Holly presents a fabricated story about Dressler being involved in car thefts, refined during her journey. Harris, while offering some recollections of Dressler, ultimately cannot provide any substantial information but discusses Dressler's possible drug habits and the company he kept, including a group referred to as the Hot Witches.

Barbara, elsewhere, contemplates her brother Jerome's manuscript and discovers additional information about Holly's case, marking a significant location on a map related to a series of disappearances. Her attention is then diverted by a call regarding a friend in the hospital, highlighting the interwoven personal concerns and professional activities of the characters.

Holly's visit concludes with Harris unable to offer valuable leads on Dressler's whereabouts but inadvertently showcases the various individuals' interconnected lives, the impact of illness and age, and the lengths taken in the pursuit of solving a mystery. Holly leaves, having gained little but reflecting on the potential dangers of the investigation and the complex lives of those she encounters.

## **8. July 23, 2021**

In Chapter 1 of the book dated July 23, 2021, we are introduced to Holly, who alongside Jerome, interviews a group of boys about the disappearance of their friend, Peter Steinman, referred to as "Stinky." The boys, including Tommy Edison and Richie Glenman, offer varied accounts about the night Peter disappeared, mentioning theories ranging from him running away to Florida to being abducted by Slender Man, an urban legend. Despite their theories, Holly is more interested in finding a link between Peter's disappearance and another case, that of Bonnie Dahl. Their investigation continues as Holly picks up an earring she believes

belongs to Bonnie and debates the reliability of the boys' accounts with Jerome.

Jerome decides to look into Steinman's disappearance more thoroughly, hoping to confirm it's unrelated to Dahl's case. Holly then reflects on the strangeness of Bonnie leaving her bike helmet behind if she indeed decided to leave town spontaneously, contemplating the possibility that Bonnie was abducted.

The chapter shifts to Holly's personal life as she deals with the estate left by her late mother, Charlotte. She's contacted by David Emerson, the executor of Charlotte's will, who informs her that her mother left everything to her, a revelation that surprises Holly due to past financial misfortunes blamed on a swindler named Daniel Hailey. As Holly processes this newfound wealth and the responsibilities it entails, she also grapples with her feelings about her mother and the house filled with painful memories. Despite her reluctance, she agrees to meet Emerson to inspect the property, motivated by a sense of duty and a need for closure.

Throughout the chapter, Holly balances her professional dedication to solving cases with her personal struggles, especially the complicated emotions regarding her family and inheritance. She shows a keen observational nature, a pragmatic approach to her work, and a deep, albeit troubled, connection to her family's past.

## **13. January 6, 2021**

On January 6, 2021, Emily (Em) and her husband Rodney (Roddy) are in their home, disturbed by the sight of a mob storming the Capitol on TV. Em, while outwardly appalled, finds the event fascinating in her deeper, unspoken opinions. She muses on the transformation of America's middle class and the thrill of political upheaval, though she would never openly admit her darker wishes for the situation.

Bonnie Rae, a younger woman working for Em, is also watching the events unfold. When Em insists on turning off the TV, the scene shifts to a more personal setting. Em directs Bonnie to work on a digital task involving Christmas and New Year's greetings, pretending to be less technologically savvy than she is. This act maintains her appearance as a harmless, intellectual elder, masking her judgmental and radical thoughts.

The narrative then reveals a sinister side to Em and Roddy's life. They discuss their next potential victim for what is implied to be a dark ritual involving human fat, hinted at when Em applies a mysterious lotion made from a man named Peter Steinman to Roddy's arthritic hands. The couple has been targeting individuals for their body fat, which they use for pain relief and potentially other, undisclosed purposes.

Em and Roddy deliberate over choosing Bonnie as their next subject, weighing the risks and benefits. They rationalize their choice with Bonnie's current life situations—her breakup, the strained relationship with her mother, and her experience of workplace harassment. Their conversation reveals a chilling detachment from morality, viewing Bonnie's personal struggles and routines as factors that make her an ideal target. This planning indicates their methodical approach to selecting victims, highlighting their hidden malevolence beneath a facade of normalcy and kindness.

As the chapter closes, the conversation between Em and Roddy, coupled with the application of the mysterious lotion, casts a dark shadow over their seemingly benign existence. Their casual discussion of targeting Bonnie and the use of harvested human fat for relief reveals a deep-seated malice and manipulation, setting the stage for a story intertwining the ordinary with the grotesque.

## **18. July 24, 2021**

Before providing a summary, please upload the chapter document that you would like summarized.

## **5. November 22–25, 2018**

Em have never had a subject who refused nourishment this long. Three days have passed since Ellen Craslow woke up in their custody, and her strength is visibly waning, yet her refusal to eat remains firm.

Professor Emily Harris, or Em, is frustrated by Ellen's steadfast refusal to consume the meat she offers—a sign of rebellion that neither of their previous captives, Cary Dressler nor Castro, displayed. Ellen, a vegan imprisoned in their basement, resists even when dehydration and starvation threaten her life. Em, attempting to coerce Ellen into eating by withholding water, finds her efforts met with a calm but firm defiance that both angers and confounds her.

Rodney Harris, Em's husband, is equally puzzled but less emotionally invested in Ellen's defiance. As a reputed biologist and nutritionist, he understands the grim biological realities facing Ellen but is intrigued by her psychological resilience. Unlike Em, his approach is more analytical, seeing Ellen as an outlier presenting a unique challenge to their *modus operandi*. He too attempts to reason with Ellen, highlighting the physical toll her hunger strike is taking and the inevitability of death if she persists.

Ellen, however, remains undeterred. Her stoicism and insight into her captors' methods—correctly identifying the presence of a woodchipper they likely intend to use for disposing of her body—unnerves Rodney. The Harrises find themselves at an impasse, confronted with a victim whose resistance is not only physical but psychological, breaking the pattern of fear and compliance they've come to expect.

The chapter alternates between perspectives, contrasting Em's growing frustration and anger with Rodney's clinical detachment, while centering Ellen's resistance as a locus of tension. The narrative vividly illustrates a battle of wills set against the backdrop of a macabre, secluded imprisonment scenario, exploring themes of power, survival, and the human spirit's capacity for resistance even in the most dire circumstances. Ellen's refusal to break, symbolized by her hunger strike, stands as a poignant assertion of autonomy and dignity in the face of unimaginable terror.

## **21. February 15, 2021–March 27, 2021**

Between February 15, 2021, and March 27, 2021, the story unfolds around the enriching meetings between Barbara Kingsbury and the seasoned poet Olivia Kingsbury. Their sessions, set in a cozy environment with tea and assorted cookies served by Marie Duchamp, mark the pursuit of poetry and self-exploration for Barbara. While Barbara deals with the pressures and expectations of her academic and personal life, including the significant project her brother Jerome undertakes, she finds solace and challenge in her secret gatherings with Olivia.

Barbara's journey is not just about learning poetry but also about confronting and articulating the nuanced experiences of her life as a young African American woman grappling with race, class, and personal trauma. Through Olivia's mentorship, Barbara is encouraged to harness her life experiences, channeling them into her poetry, thereby transforming pain and observation into expressive art. Olivia's insistence on authenticity and presence in poetry pushes Barbara to delve deeper into her thoughts and emotions, navigating through her history of suicidal ideation, racial encounters, and a distressing incident with Chet Ondowsky.

The narrative also touches on Olivia's own reminiscences of the literary society and the lost prestige of the Bell Poetry Workshop, highlighting ideological clashes within the academic realm led by figures like Emily Harris. Olivia criticizes the prioritization of profit over poetry, encapsulating a broader debate on the value and support for the arts in education. Additionally, the brief mention of Jorge Castro, a fiction writer-in-residence with a passion for poetry, underscores the interconnectedness of literary forms and the mysteries

that sometimes surround the personal lives of those who partake in their craft.

This chapter layers the personal growth and creative exploration of a young poet with broader themes of racial identity, the complexity of human experiences, and the challenges facing literary expression within academic institutions. Through their intergenerational dialogues, Barbara and Olivia navigate the delicate balance between art's power to transcend social boundaries and its entanglement with the very fabrics of race, history, and personal identity.

## **37. July 5, 2021**

July 5, 2021

Roddy enters Emily's bedroom with a sense of purpose, carrying a tray adorned with a peculiar sight—a goblet filled with a white, lard-like substance mixed with red threads. Despite Emily's visible discomfort and her inability to even consider leaving her bed due to excruciating pain, her interest is piqued by the unusual offering. Roddy reveals that he's been holding onto this suet pudding, originally forgotten in the freezer, now warmed in the oven to preserve its nutrients—an effort reflecting his disdain for the nutrient-killing nature of microwaving.

This meal is not merely a gesture of care; it's preparation for the night's task, necessitating Emily's partial rejuvenation. The method involves consuming and externally applying the rendered remains of Peter Steinman, a child whose body, despite not being overly fatty, yielded what Roddy considered 'edible gold.' As Emily consumes the fat with a ferocious appetite, Roddy assists by ensuring not a drop goes to waste, painting a vivid picture of desperation and ritual.

The scene transitions into a grotesque intimacy as Roddy applies the remainders of the fat on Emily's body, focusing on areas marred by pain. This act is part therapeutic, part preparatory—for what, is ominously hinted at with references to future uses of a girl's liver and various dishes suggesting cannibalistic undertones. Their interaction underscores a twisted bond, an unsettling mix of caregiving and exploitation wrapped in morbidity.

The night progresses, and the narrative shifts to Bonnie Dahl, who awakens to find herself in a starkly different scenario than the one described previously. She is naked, restrained, and under the watchful eyes of Roddy and Emily, now donned in gloves and aprons ready for what appears to be a sinister procedure. This cliffhanger scene contrasts sharply with the intimate yet disturbing setting of the bedroom, broadening the narrative into darker, more alarming territory.

## **39. July 29, 2021**

Holly finds herself in a terrifying situation after attempting to investigate the connection behind several disappearances, including that of Penny Dahl's daughter, Bonnie. Her investigation leads her to the home of elderly couple, Rodney and Emily Harris, who are revealed to be far more sinister than their academic backgrounds might suggest. In a harrowing sequence of events, Holly becomes imprisoned by the Harrises, who harbor dark secrets and indulge in horrific acts. Despite her dire circumstances, Holly manages to outwit and kill both her captors from within her cage, using a piece of evidence connected to one of the victims.

Barbara Robinson, close to Holly and concerned for her whereabouts, plays a crucial role in Holly's rescue. Following intuitive leads and connections among the victims, she locates Holly at the Harrises' residence. The scene she discovers in the basement - Holly locked in a makeshift cell and the Harris couple dead - is a shock. Holly, though severely dehydrated and injured, is alive and desperate for help.

The aftermath unfolds with the arrival of law enforcement, led by Detective Isabelle Jaynes. They're confronted with the grisly reality hidden in the Harris residence: evidence of cannibalism and possibly multiple murders. Holly, still in shock, is taken to the hospital for treatment and is left with the substantial emotional burden of addressing the families of the victims, particularly Penny Dahl.

The narrative touches on themes of survival, the darkness lurking in ordinary places, and the formidable resilience Holly embodies. Her ordeal underlines the real dangers of private investigation and the unexpected evil that individuals can conceal. This crisis also strengthens the bond between Holly and Barbara, illustrating the importance of community and unwavering support during catastrophic events.

This chapter reveals a grim tableau of crime hidden within a seemingly unremarkable suburban setting, showcasing Holly's courage and tenacity. Her escape and the dismantling of the Harrises' facade bring a glimmer of justice for the victims, but the emotional scars and the lingering questions about human nature and morality remain.

## **42. August 18, 2021**

On a warm morning in August, Holly Gibney enjoys the tranquility of her balcony, contemplating the significant changes in her life. No longer bound to the routine of her office job due to a temporary closure, she reflects on the possibility of never reopening Finders Keepers, the investigation agency she's part of. Pete, her colleague, considers full retirement, while Holly, having recently come into a substantial inheritance, faces the prospect of an early retirement herself. Despite this, a part of her remains reluctant, haunted by the dark memories of past cases involving malevolent forces and human depravity, the latter exemplified by the horrific acts of Roddy and Emily Harris.

The chapter delves into Holly's internal battle with the evil she's encountered, particularly the natural, non-supernatural kind, which she finds most disturbing. These reflections are triggered by the heinous crimes of the Harrises, whose mundane exterior masked their true monstrous nature. Holly is forced to reconcile the veneer of normality in individuals capable of unspeakable acts, a realization that challenges her view of humanity.

In the midst of these reflections, Holly receives a call from Barbara Robinson, a friend and fellow survivor of traumatic events linked to their investigations. Barbara's triumph in winning the Penley Prize and having her poetry published serves as a stark contrast to the darkness permeating Holly's thoughts. Barbara's achievement offers a moment of light, her poetry providing a means of coping with her own experiences of horror.

As Holly ponders her future, torn between withdrawing from a world rife with evil or continuing her work, the narrative explores themes of resilience, the capacity for both good and evil within humanity, and the search for redemption and purpose amidst the aftermath of trauma. The chapter closes with Holly facing a critical decision, symbolized by a ringing phone: to embrace a new, peaceful life funded by her inheritance or to reengage with the dark realities of her profession by answering the call. Her choice, made in the final moments, reflects a commitment to confronting evil, influenced by the legacy of her mentor, Bill Hodges, and her own inner strength.

## **10. July 23, 2021**

On July 23, 2021, Holly Gibney finds herself grappling with the shocking news of inheriting over six million dollars from her family, unable to reconcile her newfound wealth with her current life as a private investigator and the simple needs she has. Despite the heatwave, Holly delays the comfort of her car's AC to

focus on her case: locating a missing woman named Bonnie Dahl. Holly's investigation leads her to George Rafferty, who alongside Marvin Brown, found Bonnie's bike abandoned at a defunct auto shop. Both men provide insights, but Holly feels the key to the case might lie with Lakeisha Stone, a close friend of Bonnie's.

Lakeisha is unavailable, so Holly speaks with Penny Dahl, Bonnie's mother, deepening her understanding of Bonnie's recent activities through discussions about credit card transactions and Bonnie's phone. Holly reflects on her own family's secrets, pushing aside personal woes to concentrate on the case. She obtains crucial leads from library employees, Edie Brookings and Margaret Brenner, who confirm an earring found near Bonnie's bike belongs to her, stressing Bonnie's introverted nature and close friendship with Lakeisha.

Throughout her investigation, Holly contemplates the implications of her inheritance and the mysteries surrounding her own family, alongside her commitment to her client. Contacts with old friends and professional affiliations like Pete Huntley offer a blend of support and distraction from her personal sorrows. Holly's day ends with unresolved questions about Bonnie's disappearance, hints of illegal investigative methods for financial insight, and the looming task of managing her mother's estate. Holly's deep sense of duty to her case and her clients, coupled with her internal struggles, paints a vivid picture of a complex character facing life-changing circumstances while dedicated to solving a perplexing mystery.

## **24. July 26, 2021**

When Holly arrives at the Jet Mart, she finds Emilio Herrera, the clerk, willing to talk about Bonnie Rae Dahl, a regular customer who has recently gone missing. Emilio recalls Bonnie's friendly nature and consistent patronage, highlighting her kindness and routine purchases. Despite examining her surroundings for any unusual activity on the night Bonnie disappeared, Holly learns nothing significant from Emilio regarding any suspicious activity or the presence of a particular van she inquires about. Holly also shows him a picture of a missing boy, Peter Steinman, with Emilio only able to provide vague recognition.

Back at her apartment, Holly deals with a harsh online comment and makes a difficult call to Penny Dahl, Bonnie's mother, to share her growing suspicion that Bonnie was abducted. Despite the grim conversation, Holly feels stumped about her next steps in the investigation.

Jerome, Holly's friend, calls from New York, excited about a successful book deal, contrasting Holly's current professional standstill. Holly's lack of progress continues to weigh on her as she reflects on Emily and Roddy Harris, an elderly couple indirectly involved with the disappearances. They are aware of Holly's investigation and discuss potential measures to handle the situation, including sinister implications if Holly becomes a problem.

Barbara Robinson, Jerome's sister, gets a call from Jerome sharing his news and touches briefly on Holly's investigation, though Barbara is preoccupied with her own projects. That night, Holly dreams of her past, leading her to reflect on her relationship with her father, signified by a Latin-written postcard from him.

This chapter dives into Holly's professional challenges and personal reflections amidst her investigation into several disappearances, juxtaposing her perseverance with the nuanced lives and implications of those around her.

## **15. February 8, 2021**

On a pleasantly unseasonable day in February, following a harsh January, Roddy Harris decides to wash his Subaru wagon to remove the destructive salt accumulation from its body. His decision comes amidst concerns from his wife, Em, regarding his arthritis, but Roddy, insistent on enjoying the rare warm weather,

proceeds with his plan. As he prepares to wash the car, a young woman named Barbara Robinson approaches him. Dressed in vibrant red attire and holding a slim folder close, she inquires after Em, expressing a desire to discuss something likely related to a Writer's Workshop.

The narrative delves into the intricacies and dynamics of Roddy and Em's relationship, highlighting their personal quirks and the affectionate, albeit stubborn nature of Roddy. The conversation with Barbara hints at a potential interest in writing, but with an underlying context of challenges faced by the writing community, notably the suspension of a workshop program due to the passing of Jim Shepard and others' disinterest in the transition to remote learning—a dilemma likened humorously to making love while wearing boxing gloves by the department's current writer in residence, Henry Stratton.

Roddy perceives Barbara as an ambitious individual aiming to hone her writing craft, akin to aspiring to the renown of Toni Morrison or Alice Walker. However, he leaves it to Em to deliver the disheartening news regarding the Writer's Workshop. Inside their interaction lies an intricate dance of desire, aspiration, and the realities of practical limitations, with Roddy reflecting on the complexities of memory, obligation, and the continuity of everyday life through small tasks like car washing. This moment also subtly reveals layers of community interaction, personal goals, and the impact of external circumstances on individual pursuits and relationships, all wrapped in the guise of a simple weekday encounter.

## **19. February 12, 2021**

Barbara Robinson, braving the bitter cold in her red winter attire, nervously approaches 70 Ridge Road, the residence of her idol, Olivia Kingsbury, a venerated American poet with ties to T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. Contrasting her youthful inexperience with the legacy of Kingsbury, Barbara is fraught with self-doubt about her own poetic ambitions. Yet, Olivia had invited her over email after reviewing her poem – an invitation that both honored and intimidated Barbara.

Upon her arrival, Barbara meets Olivia, a centenarian poet living in a modest Victorian home, filled with the unexpected like a large-screen TV, and furnished minimally. Olivia's interaction with her assistant, Marie, reveals a blend of command and affection, setting a comfortable tone for Barbara's visit. Olivia, dismissing formalities, insists on equality in their discourse, propelling Barbara into an unforeseen sense of belonging.

Their conversation meanders through Barbara's personal life before delving into the essence of why she writes poetry. Olivia's probing questions challenge Barbara to articulate the chaos and clarity that poetry brings to her perception of the world. Olivia critiques the academic approach to poetry, encouraging Barbara to value the organic rhythm and personal voice over prescribed formats.

Unexpectedly, Olivia offers Barbara regular mentorship sessions, signaling a rare opportunity for Barbara to learn from a literary icon, far removed from the collegiate criticisms of Emily Harris, another professor who had shown an interest in Barbara's work. Olivia's blunt caution against the influence of the HARRISES adds layers to the academic landscape Barbara navigates, wedging a distinct divide between genuine mentorship and authoritative instruction.

The closing conversation shifts toward race and poetry, where Olivia, in a poignant moment, inquires if Barbara's poems were compelled to reflect "the Black experience" as per Emily's inquiry. This exchange subtly uncovers the layered expectations and pressures on Black artists to conform to thematic narratives. Olivia's insistence on honesty and authenticity underscores the core of their emerging mentor-protégé relationship.

Throughout the visit, Barbara transitions from a trembling newcomer to an inspired poet, emboldened by Olivia's validation and support. This chapter sets the stage for a profound exploration of creativity, mentorship, and identity, against the backdrop of generational and cultural intersections within the realm of

American poetry.

## **25. May 19, 2021**

On May 19, 2021, Barbara rushes to Kiner Memorial's oncology department after a call from Marie, expecting something routine yet urgent. The hospital lounge, with its comforting decor and ambient music, contrasts with the tension of those waiting. Barbara finds Marie, who explains that their mutual acquaintance, Olivia, has cancer but it's a slow-progressing type that she has lived with for years. This visit, however, is not solely for a check-up; Olivia has news for Barbara.

Olivia's condition, described with her usual wry humor as "ass-cancer," has been a long-term battle, monitored carefully by Dr. Brown. Despite its malignancy, the cancer crawls at a pace allowing Olivia to manage life almost as usual, with increasing doctor visits to monitor its growth. Barbara, a high school senior, momentarily puts aside her academic priorities, concerned and curious about the reason for Marie's call and Olivia's condition.

The discussion moves towards Barbara's life, her poetry, and an envelope Olivia presents to Barbara, which contains news of Barbara's inclusion in the Penley poetry shortlist - a significant achievement greeted with a mix of relief and emotional overwhelm by Barbara. This moment offers a brief respite from the grim atmosphere of the hospital, showcasing a blend of personal triumph amidst ongoing struggles.

After leaving the hospital, the drive back to Ridge Road is filled with a mix of nostalgia, as Olivia sings along to tunes from her past, and anticipation as Barbara processes her achievement. Despite Olivia's physical frailty highlighted by a slow, unsteady walk and her candid acknowledgment of her bodily functions, she maintains a sharp wit and a strong spirit.

The chapter closes with a touching yet comic moment in the foyer of their home, where Olivia, ever the matriarch with a blend of candor and humor, encourages Barbara to release her pent-up emotions in a scream, acknowledging both the weight of her medical condition and Barbara's recent success. This blend of life's ups and downs, captured on a seemingly ordinary day, frames the story's emotional landscape, highlighting resilience, relationships, and the complex interplay of human emotions in the face of adversity and achievement.

## **30. July 27, 2021**

On July 27, 2021, Holly meets with Avram Welch at his Sunrise Bay condominium, filled with boats in bottles and a cherished photo of his late wife, Mary, who succumbed to lung cancer despite never smoking. Welch recounts the significant dates surrounding his double knee replacement and the last times he frequented the bowling alley, expressing fondness for Cary, a well-liked, albeit a bit eccentric, member of their bowling group, known among them as the Golden Oldies. Cary's and others' marijuana use during their gatherings, according to Welch, enhanced their game, except for Roddy, who abstained. Holly considers the possibility of Welch being the Red Bank Predator, which conflicts profoundly with her instincts and beliefs.

Meanwhile, Barbara is engrossed in Randall Jarrell's poetry, interrupted by a call from her brother Jerome, who excitedly shares his upcoming weekend plans in Montauk. Their conversation shifts to Barbara's poetry endeavors, leading to her revealing a significant literary opportunity with the Penley Prize, thanks to Olivia Kingsbury's secret submission of her work. Jerome's enthusiastic response to her news reflects their strong sibling bond.

Jerome then updates Barbara on Holly's detective work, which might have accidentally unearthed a serial killer operating near Deerfield Park or the college. His recent epiphany about the case intrigues Barbara,



shifting her focus from personal achievements to family and crime-solving involvement. Jerome's request for Barbara to retrieve an orange flash drive from their father's study indicates a new twist or vital evidence in their collaborative effort to understand the mystery at hand.

## Author's Note

In the author's note for "Holly," Stephen King addresses a notable continuity issue related to the COVID-19 pandemic that arose from the difference in real-world timing and the fictional timeline of his works. He explains that when "If It Bleeds" was written in 2019, the pandemic was not yet a global concern, leading to a discrepancy in the timeline. Despite this, "Holly" incorporates the pandemic into its narrative, reflecting on its significant impact. King anticipates that some readers might view the COVID-19 subplot as preachy but clarifies that his aim is to create fiction that resonates with real-world events and perspectives, even if those perspectives don't align with his own. He highlights this through the character of Rodney Harris, whose beliefs about cannibalism and health are rooted in factual research but lead to false conclusions, emphasizing King's effort to include diverse viewpoints.

King also acknowledges the contributions of his research assistant, Robin Furth, who provided detailed information on cannibalism and helped maintain continuity within the "Mr. Mercedes" trilogy's universe, particularly for the character Holly Gibney. He notes the assistance received from various individuals and organizations for language and classical subjects expertise, offering gratitude for their support. King expresses personal thanks to his agent, Charles "Chuck" Verrill, who passed away in 2022, and to others who have supported him in his career, including his editor Nan Graham, his wife, novelist Tabitha King, and his pet Molly.

The note concludes with a personal reflection on the genesis of "Holly." Inspired to write a specific scene of Holly attending her mother's Zoom funeral, King searched for a story that could frame this poignant moment. The idea was sparked by a newspaper headline about an honor killing, which eventually morphed into a narrative about sinister elderly characters. This reveals King's creative process and his dedication to exploring themes of mortality and human complexity through his characters. King thanks his readers for joining him on another journey into dark narrative territories.

## 34. July 27, 2021

Holly Gibney is on a somewhat aimless investigation into a series of disappearances, suspecting a connection between the victims and a local bowling team, the Golden Oldies. After contemplating the lack of progress and the improbability of Roddy Harris, a member of the team, being involved, she decides to follow up on another lead instead, diverting her trip to check on her Uncle Henry at a care center.

Holly's investigation intertwines with personal reflections and interactions, including a drive-thru meal at Burger King and a phone call to Penny Dahl, who is anxious for updates on the search for her missing daughter. Holly's conversation with Penny is strained; she promises a full report within 24 hours while feeling the weight of Penny's expectation and threat to fire her.

Amidst investigative dead-ends and calls to and from family, Holly learns from her brother, Jerome, about a significant advancement for a friend, Barbara, in the literary world. Jerome also shares an insight about a van seen in security footage, which could be crucial for the case.

The narrative shifts to Barbara, who is in a hospital waiting with a friend for news about a poet she admires, reflecting on the fragility of life and balancing personal grief with professional achievements.

Simultaneously, Emily Harris, who appears connected to the case Holly is investigating, is depicted in a domestic scene with Roddy. They discuss Holly's inquiries with a mix of disdain and caution, hinting at their own secretive and potentially sinister activities.

This chapter blends Holly's professional endeavors with her personal life, offering insights into her character and relationships while advancing the narrative of a complex investigation. Each section reveals layers of intrigue, from the procedural aspects of detective work to the emotional dimensions of Holly's interactions with those around her, all set against a backdrop of unresolved disappearances and dark suspicions.

## **23. March 27, 2021**

When Barbara arrives at Marie Duchamp's Victorian house on Ridge Road, she finds Marie and Olivia in a tense conversation. Olivia attempts to apologize for an action she regrets, regarding submitting Barbara's poems to the Penley Prize for Younger Poets—a prestigious award sponsored by New York's Big Five publishers—without Barbara's knowledge or consent. Barbara, though initially confused and unaware of the prize, is surprised but not angered by their initiative.

Olivia expresses guilt for submitting Barbara's poems and fears Barbara's reaction. Barbara learns that her work, which she shared with Olivia out of a shared passion for poetry, has been listed among the ninety-five finalists for the Penley Prize. This unexpected acknowledgment of her talent confronts Barbara with a choice: to submit more poems for further consideration or not. The prize offers not only a significant monetary reward but also the opportunity for the winner's poetry to be published by a major publishing house.

Amidst this revelation, the discussions pivot to Barbara's personal reflections on her craft, its secretive nature, and her desire not to overshadow her brother's achievements in literature. Barbara decides to pursue the opportunity, requesting Olivia's help in selecting poems for submission while insisting on keeping their efforts confidential to avoid familial tension.

The chapter closes with a moment of camaraderie among Barbara, Marie, and Olivia, sharing in the celebratory albeit secret toast, symbolizing their friendship and mutual support. Olivia, recognizing Barbara's talent and potential, advises her to broaden her literary horizons by exploring works beyond poetry, suggesting authors and novels that might enrich her understanding and expression, further cementing their mentor-student relationship.

## **26. July 27, 2021**

July 27, 2021, marks the day Holly Gibney receives a call from Emilio Herrera of Jet Mart, leading her into a missing persons investigation involving a young man named Cary Dressler, who was once a regular customer. Described as a stoner and avid movie fan, Dressler was known for his long blond hair and noisy moped covered in stickers. His disappearance from his routine stop at Jet Mart around the time Trump was running for president catches Holly's interest. Following leads, Holly learns Dressler had a penchant for Drive-In Rock, a secluded spot for watching movies, suggesting a solitary yet content lifestyle fueled by high-caffeine soda and possibly marijuana.

Holly's investigative steps are methodical and thorough, engaging with various individuals from different walks of life - from a shift worker at Jet Mart to the staff and owner of Strike Em Out Lanes, where Cary worked. Each person adds layers to Cary's character; a diligent worker, a reliable league scheduler, and a kind soul whose sudden disappearance left a void.

The investigation deepens as Holly explores Cary's workplace and acquaintances, revealing a pattern of missing persons all connected to the Red Bank Avenue area. The detail on Cary's last paycheck and the remnants of his past suggest a sudden end rather than a planned departure, assembling a picture of a young man deeply meshed in his community, whose absence is felt profoundly.

Haverty, the bowling alley's owner, shares Cary's background - a resilient young man fleeing a troubled past, finding solace in movies, work, and possibly substances. As Holly navigates through team photographs and gathers information, she unearths Cary's integral role in the bowling community, his popularity and absence unsettlingly poignant.

Inquiries lead Holly to Hugh Clippard, a potential mine of information about Cary, as Holly speculates on a predator leveraging intimate knowledge about potential victims' vulnerabilities. Deep-seated insecurities fuel Holly's dedication to solving the case, suggesting a personal connection and empathy towards the missing, a drive beyond mere professional obligation.

Holly's investigation into Cary Dressler's life and disappearance paints a multifaceted portrait of a community grappling with loss and the eerie presence of a predator exploiting the fractures within. Her journey reflects a melding of methodical detective work with a profound understanding of human nature and the shadows lurking within seemingly mundane lives.

## **22. July 26, 2021**

Holly Gibney begins her day responding to an unsuccessful Twitter inquiry about Ellen Craslow but remains optimistic. While getting ready, she receives an enthusiastic call from her friend Jerome, who is on his way to New York City for a book deal. Despite her concerns about COVID-19, Holly is genuinely happy for Jerome. Her morning takes a turn towards her professional interests when Pete Huntley calls to provide the last known address and a photo of Ellen Craslow, reigniting their investigation into Ellen's disappearance.

Following the lead, Holly ventures to MLK Boulevard, finding herself at Elm Grove Trailer Park, where Ellen's last known residence is located. She converses with the trailer park's manager, Stella Lacey, who confirms Ellen's residency and shares recollections of Ellen as a tenant, along with the sudden vacancy of Ellen's trailer around late 2018. Holly's detective instincts lead her to continue her pursuit, despite the lack of conclusive information on Ellen's whereabouts or status.

Holly's next step involves a visit to Imani McGuire, a neighbor of Ellen's who might have insights into her sudden disappearance. During a heartfelt conversation, Imani reveals Ellen's traumatic past, including her estrangement from her family, a horrific incident of rape, and her eventual move away from her hometown in search of a better life. The narrative takes an intriguing turn when Imani mentions a woman, possibly named Dickens or Dixon, who claimed to be collecting Ellen's belongings to take them back to Georgia, sparking new questions and directions in Holly's investigation.

Throughout this journey, Holly is portrayed as empathetic and committed, demonstrating her determination to uncover the truth behind Ellen Craslow's disappearance. Jerome's subplot provides a contrast to Holly's gritty investigation, highlighting themes of success and the excitement of new opportunities, while the detailed account of Ellen's past and Holly's interactions with the trailer park residents deepen the mystery and set the stage for further investigation. Holly remains driven by a mix of professional duty and personal conviction, setting aside her own challenges to pursue justice for Ellen Craslow.

## **6. July 23, 2021**

July 23, 2021, marks the beginning of Holly Gibney's investigation into the disappearance of Bonnie Rae Dahl, following her meticulous cleanliness routines in her office and reflecting on her mother's death. Holly, a detailed and methodical investigator, is hired by Penny Dahl to look into her daughter Bonnie Rae's vanishing case. After Penny leaves, Holly meticulously cleans her office space, driven by a routine that echoes her concern for safety, likely influenced by her mother's passing due to COVID-19 complications. This detail sets the tone for Holly's character—thorough, methodical, and deeply personal in her approach to her work and life.

Holly's focus shifts to Bonnie Rae's missing bike and helmet, considering them crucial leads. She calls Izzy Jaynes, revealing a connection between professional and personal realms, as they discuss Holly's recent losses and the intricacies of the investigation. Izzy, a police officer, shares insights on the case and the current state of law enforcement, hinting at strained resources due to COVID-19 and political tensions. Their conversation reveals Holly's delicate balancing act between empathy and the necessity of distance in professional matters.

Armed with optimism and methodical rigor, Holly embarks on her investigation. Her preparations are meticulous, highlighting her focus on health safety amidst a pandemic—underscored by both concern and an acknowledgment of her own vulnerabilities, such as smoking.

Holly's investigation on site involves a thorough examination of the terrain surrounding the location where Bonnie Rae's bike was found, driven by her intense focus on detail and her reflexive concern for safety from snakes and poison ivy. Her discovery of a clip-on earring, potentially belonging to Bonnie Rae, ignites a “hot burst of excitement,” showcasing the deeply personal satisfaction Holly derives from advancements in her investigations.

Holly's introspection and method of coping with her mother's death permeate her actions, blending her personal grief with her professional pursuits. This intertwining of personal loss and professional responsibility emphasizes Holly's complex character, her resilience, and her deep-seated drive to resolve the case at hand.

Enlisting Jerome Robinson's assistance for questioning potential witnesses illustrates Holly's self-awareness and her strategic approach to investigation. Education through past experiences shapes her methods, acknowledging both her strengths and limitations. This strategic collaboration highlights the importance of community and shared history in enriching Holly's investigative process.

Upon reflection at the park and subsequent interaction with local youths, Holly navigates societal perceptions and her personal insecurities, demonstrating growth and adaptability. Her capacity to engage with witnesses, despite personal fears, underscores a prevailing theme of overcoming personal barriers to fulfill professional obligations and personal quests for understanding and resolution.

The chapter sets a complex stage of personal loss, professional dedication, and the intersecting challenges of conducting an investigation amidst societal unrest and a global pandemic. Holly Gibney's character is presented as meticulous, empathetic, and profoundly shaped by her experiences, illustrating a narrative rich in personal depth and investigative intrigue.

## **28. July 27, 2021**

In the chapter, Holly Gibney investigates Cary Dressler's disappearance, focusing on his connections to the local bowling community, particularly the team known as the Golden Oldies. Beginning at Strike Em Out bowling alley, where she discreetly photographs a group picture including a young Barbara Robinson, Holly's investigation leads her to Hugh Clippard, a member of the Golden Oldies. At Clippard's luxurious

residence, she learns more about Cary's character, his informal role within the team, and the close-knit nature of the bowling community, despite recent losses and changes. Clippard reveals some members bought marijuana from Cary, which indicates a personal connection beyond the lanes. Despite the light-hearted recount of past times, a sense of melancholy permeates the conversation as Clippard contemplates the impacts of aging and the changing dynamics of their group.

Holly's methodical approach to her investigation demonstrates her dedication to uncovering the truth behind Cary's disappearance. She plans to continue her inquiry by visiting other team members, cautiously optimistic but aware of the challenges ahead. Meanwhile, Barbara Robinson, struggling with writer's block for an important essay, eventually finds clarity and a burst of inspiration through physical exertion and a mental breakthrough. She rebelliously dismisses conventional expectations, symbolically writing her essay across the ruled lines of her notebook, declaring that her poetry itself is her truest expression and submission for the contest.

This chapter sketches a vivid picture of Holly's investigative diligence and Barbara's creative struggle and defiance. It also delves into the themes of community, aging, and self-expression, portraying characters grappling with personal and collective transformations.

## About the Author

Stephen King, a renowned author with a prolific literary career, has penned more than sixty titles, all of which have enjoyed global success. His body of work encompasses a diverse range of genres, with recent contributions including a mix of novels and collections such as "Fairy Tale," "Billy Summers," "If It Bleeds," "The Institute," "Elevation," "The Outsider," and "Sleeping Beauties," the last of which was a collaborative effort with his son Owen King. Additionally, King has authored the critically acclaimed Bill Hodges trilogy, comprising "End of Watch," "Finders Keepers," and "Mr. Mercedes," with the latter not only securing the Edgar Award for Best Novel but also adapted into a television series available on Peacock.

One of his notable works, "11/22/63," has been recognized by the New York Times Book Review as one of the top ten books of 2011, further cementing King's position as a master storyteller. His contributions to literature have been acknowledged with various awards, including the 2018 PEN America Literary Service Award, the 2014 National Medal of Arts, and the 2003 National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters.

Stephen King resides in Bangor, Maine, with his spouse, Tabitha King, who is also a novelist. His extensive portfolio continues to attract a wide readership, and his influence extends beyond the written word, with several of his works being adapted into films and television series. Further information about King and his works can be found on Simon and Schuster's website, alongside social media platforms where updates about his latest projects and endeavors are regularly posted.

## 16. July 24, 2021

On July 24, 2021, Holly arrives early at her late mother's house in Meadowbrook Estates. Holly watches the A.D. Cleaning crew leave the house, a company specialized in post-mortem cleanups, indicating her mother died of natural causes, necessitating only a COVID-related disinfection. Holly retrieves an envelope left by the cleaners, confirming no items were removed from the house.

Holly reflects on her mother's frugal lifestyle despite being a millionaire, experiencing mixed feelings of resentment and anger over her mother's choices and their strained relationship. She sarcastically muses about her drink of choice, mai-tai, which reminds her of happier fantasies, starkly contrasting with her current

emotions faced with entering her mother's property and dealing with her passing.

Holly's past interweaves with her present situation. She met Bill Hodges, who treated her kindly, at her grandmother Elizabeth Wharton's funeral, marking the beginning of a transformation in her life. Despite her family's disapproval, Bill's encouragement led Holly to find her own path and significantly contribute to solving major cases with Hodges.

Holly recalls her family's financial deceit orchestrated by her mother, Charlotte, and her Uncle Henry, convincing her of a significant financial loss due to a scam, leading Holly to reluctantly consider closing her private investigation business. However, her resolve strengthens against this manipulation.

As Holly prepares to meet Counselor David Emerson and his associates for legal matters regarding her mother's estate, she encounters neighborly condolences and a sense of obligation towards handling her mother's belongings—a duty that feels both burdensome and emotional.

Inside her mother's house, memories flood back as Holly deals with the formalities of her inheritance and discovers her mother had amassed a considerable collection of valuable jewelry unknown to Holly. This revelation, coupled with the conversation with Emerson, adds layers to Holly's understanding of her mother's secretive nature and the complexities of their relationship.

After the legal procedures, Holly indulges in a rare act of rebellion by smoking indoors, a simple pleasure denied by her mother's strict rules. This act, along with reflections on her difficult past, highlighted by experiences of bullying, an abusive boss, and the impact of her mother's controlling tendencies on her life choices, underlines Holly's journey towards independence.

Holly's exploration of her childhood room brings a mix of nostalgia and pain, leading her to discard elements of her past symbolically. She contemplates the genuine yet complicated love her mother had for her, despite the manipulative and damaging aspects of their relationship.

In a cathartic act, Holly destroys her mother's collection of china figurines, distancing herself from the objects that represented her mother's control and deceit. This physical act of breaking away from her past is juxtaposed with Holly's emotional struggle to reconcile with her mother's actions and their impact on her life.

Holly's departure from her mother's house, leaving behind the shattered remnants of a conflicted relationship, signifies her ongoing struggle to understand her mother's choices and navigate the emotional aftermath of her passing. Through this, Holly faces the reality of their complex relationship, grappling with feelings of loss, betrayal, and the pursuit of personal freedom and identity beyond her mother's shadow.

## **31. July 2, 2021**

On July 2, 2021, Bonnie awakens in a cell within the basement of the seemingly respectable Professors Harris's Victorian home, grappling with thirst and a headache but unaware of the grim experiments conducted by her captors, Rodney and Emily Harris. Unlike previous victims, Jorge Castro, Cary Dressler, Ellen, and Pete, who suffered from ketamine and Valium-induced hangovers, Bonnie is oblivious to the Harris's sinister utilization of their captives, aimed at prolonging their vitality through the consumption of human livers. The Harris's meticulous yet macabre practices include avoiding pigs' liver due to prion risks and opting for calf's liver to mimic human liver benefits.

Bonnie, imprisoned and monitored, contemplates her earring as a potential tool for escape, reflecting on the comfort it provides amidst her dire situation. As a prisoner anticipated to endure, she discovers subtle changes in her captivity conditions, such as the brand of water allocated to her, insights into her captors'

preferences and peculiarities.

Attempting to rationalize her abduction, Bonnie dissects possible motives, ruling out sexuality due to the Harris's age, and leans towards bizarre experimentation, something Rodney has a reputation for in academic circles. Her thoughts shift to who might notice her absence, but doubts surface due to current personal estrangements and societal disruptions caused by COVID-19.

When Rodney Harris enters the basement to deliver food, reflecting his and Emily's declining health and the decreasing efficacy of their cannibalistic regimen, Bonnie confronts him seeking answers but receives none, as Rodney adheres to Emily's advice of silence towards their 'livestock.' The sight of her captor's bruise, a result of their struggle during her capture, ignites a mix of emotions in Bonnie, from triumph to anger.

Enduring her grim situation, Bonnie finds solace in the small acts of rebellion and moments of joy, such as challenging Rodney or savoring Ka'Chava despite the lack of a spoon. Her resilience shines as she clings to her identity and humanity amidst the horrors of her captivity, signaling her unwavering spirit and determination to survive.

## **35. July 4, 2021**

Rodney Harris, the family chef, prepares dinner while his wife, Emily, suffers from severe sciatic pain. He serves a prisoner in their basement, Bonnie Dahl, a cold bottle of Diet Pepsi, secretly tampered with a dose of Valium. Rodney speaks to Bonnie with a cold detachment, viewing her as mere livestock necessary for their grim purposes.

Bonnie, deprived and weakened, quickly succumbs to the drugged soda, her desperation and despair palpable. Upstairs, Emily anxiously waits for news of Bonnie's condition, her discomfort overshadowed by a morbid anticipation. Rodney reassures her, intent on adding more sedatives to ensure Bonnie's compliance.

In the basement, Rodney cautiously checks on Bonnie, confirming her sedated state before dragging her across the basement to a room equipped more like a horror movie's surgery than anything found in a normal household. With difficulty and amid personal physical agony, he manages the logistics of prepping Bonnie for what is hinted to be a fatal procedure, aimed at alleviating Emily's pain through unspeakable means.

This chapter introduces a disturbing narrative of desperation, moral corruption, and the lengths people will go to alleviate personal suffering. Rodney and Emily's twisted dependence on others for their well-being contrasts sharply with the terror and helplessness experienced by their victims. The chilling normalcy with which Rodney conducts his preparations underscores the horror of their actions, leaving readers to ponder the darkness lurking within seemingly ordinary lives.

## **29. July 1, 2021**

On July 1, 2021, at 8:03 AM, Bonnie Rae Dahl engages in a routine visit to the Jet Mart on Red Bank Avenue, greeting the cashier, Emilio, before selecting a Diet Pepsi and contemplating snack choices. Meanwhile, Roddy Harris, afflicted with physical and mental deterioration, and Emily, suffering from severe sciatica, prepare for a sinister operation relying on abducting a suitable target for their delusional belief in the rejuvenating qualities of human organs.

Bonnie, rejecting the temptation of Ho Hos, completes her purchase, unaware that she is being observed by Emily and Roddy from a nearby location. As she exits, they prepare to lure her into a trap under the pretense of requiring assistance due to Emily's feigned mobility issue.

Bonnie, initially bypassing Roddy's plea for help, sense of goodwill compels her to return, only to be deceitfully engaged by Roddy, who feigns a dire need for assistance with Emily's wheelchair. Despite the induce as part of their planned ruse, Roddy secretly administers a potent dose of Valium to Bonnie, expecting her to succumb rapidly.

However, Bonnie's unexpected resilience disrupts their plan. Even as the drug begins to impair her, she attempts to flee, leading to a desperate struggle between her and Roddy. Her vitality astonishes Roddy, reinforcing his morbid anticipation for her capture.

The encounter culminates with Bonnie momentarily overpowering Roddy, only to finally collapse under the drug's influence. Roddy, despite his physical ailments and Emily's inability to assist, manages to seize Bonnie, foreseeing their dreadful intentions as he drags her towards the van. This chilling sequence outlines the predatory trap laid by Roddy and Emily, masked under the guise of an innocuous request for help, setting the stage for the perverse motivations driving their actions.

## **9. December 2–14, 2018**

In the heart of the Christmas season along Ridge Road, the quiet and genteel Victorian Row stands tastefully adorned in modest holiday decor, a stark contrast to the more gaudy embellishments of other neighborhoods. Amidst this backdrop, the home of Roddy and Em Harris at 93 Ridge Road remains undecorated, a reflection of their declining health and spirits. Roddy, grappling with arthritis exacerbated by the cold, and Em, confined to a wheelchair due to severe sciatica, have forgone their usual festive preparations. Despite their ailments, they anticipate a potential improvement in their conditions and hold onto the hope of hosting their traditional Christmas gathering.

Their lives, deeply intertwined and marked by a distinctly routine existence, revolve around the simpler pleasures of shared meals in their kitchen, rather than the dining room reserved for rare guest appearances. A sense of nostalgia and a longing for better health permeate their interactions, highlighted by a dinner that Em manages to find a sliver of appetite for, thanks to the enticing aromas from Roddy's cooking. Their evening is a blend of ceremony and simplicity, with fine china and Wedgwood settings, yet underscored by a feeling of weariness from their physical ailments.

As they dine, their conversation naturally drifts to memories of yesteryears, friends lost or gone, and a shared resilience against the burdens of age. The mundane act of sharing a meal ignites a brief flicker of vitality and camaraderie between them, momentarily pushing aside the encroaching shadows of their health issues. This scene is tenderly juxtaposed with their ongoing struggle, painting a picture of enduring love through the trials of aging.

Later, as the neighborhood's Christmas lights dim, the pair finds a modest increase in their well-being, hinting at a peculiar yet unspoken efficacy in their unorthodox dietary choices. Em's mobility shows marked improvement, and a brief interaction with Roddy reinforces the theme of their shared journey through aging, underscored by a mix of humor, affection, and a subtly veiled reference to their unique and macabre means of sustenance, cloaked in the normalcy of their evening routine. Their story is one of love enduring the ravages of time, shadowed by the sinister underpinnings of their methods to combat the inevitable decline that accompanies aging.

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